

Six Reasons Why Moms Can Cancel Their Gym Memberships

By Glynis Astie

I discovered something fascinating after I gave birth to my second child and decided to stay at home with my boys. Since my salary would just offset the cost of daycare and my commuting costs, the decision to leave the rat race was easy. Little did I know life as a stay-at-home mom was a lot more than I had bargained for. I remember thinking how nice it would be to live a life with considerably less stress, plenty of free time during the day and much more sleep.

It didn't take long for me to realize I had been completely delusional! I can laugh about it now, but the first year at home almost killed my spirit. Granted much of my distress had to do with the fact that my second child didn't appear to have much of a need for sleep, but I still had to reframe my thinking about what it meant to be at home with my children. There was, in fact, very little time to do anything, including taking showers, eating, and using the bathroom, since babies are demanding little individuals. On the rare occasion I found myself with a spare half hour, I was too frazzled to use it productively.

In an attempt to remove myself from said frazzled state, I decided to join a gym. I reasoned not only would I lose the baby weight, but would also get a small break from the baby while my older son was in school. And I will admit, this was a good plan. The weight eventually came off (well, all but the last five pounds, but they seem to be very happy with their new home) and the baby became a toddler. This changed EVERYTHING.

I have since found you can get a damn near total body workout simply by taking care of your kids. Don't believe me? If you really think about it, you'll see your day is just one long-ass circuit training session...

The Stair Master

My house has two very steep sets of stairs. When we first moved into our house, I had been romanced by the idea of stairs since there weren't any in the house I grew up in. When I was younger, I felt like I was missing out on something by not having stairs to climb. I now see I was only missing a great workout.

If you have children, how many times do you think you go up and down your stairs in a day? Ten? Twenty? One day I decided to humor myself and I actually counted. Forty-eight! Think the number is too high? My mornings go something like this: bring my younger son downstairs because he has to eat immediately upon waking. Go back upstairs to get the phone and tablet I left next to my bed because I wasn't quite awake yet. Realize when I get downstairs I left my water bottle upstairs. Then realize when I get downstairs again I forgot to brush my teeth. That will just have to wait until later. Once everyone has eaten, I go back upstairs to get brush my teeth and get dressed. Get back downstairs and realize I have forgotten to put on my earrings. Go back upstairs and grab the socks my older son forgot to put on, get halfway down stairs and go back for the earrings. And the pattern continues for another twenty minutes. Once my coffee kicks in, things get somewhat better, but the difference is marginal.

I know what you're thinking. Why don't you just make yourself a list? The truth is it wouldn't do me much good. While some elements of my routine would stay the same, many of them change on a daily basis in terms of items needed. Rather than bemoan my fate of incredibly forgetful stair climber, I choose to focus on the fact that I'm getting a great workout. Did you know climbing stairs is an excellent aerobic workout? You burn calories and work a number of muscle groups. While you resentfully run back up the stairs for one last item, just remember your quads, hamstrings, glutes AND calves are going to look great if you keep this up! And as an added bonus, your abs will get a bit perkier as well.

Low Impact Cardio

Along with climbing stairs often, I find myself walking from room to room in my house as though I'm doing laps. This will often happen in coordination with the stair master mentioned above, but sometimes becomes an activity unto itself. Once I've finished a bracing round of stair master in the morning, I find the low impact activity taking over. After everyone is dressed and ready for school, the lunch preparations begin. Following asking my older son

what he would like to eat for lunch and ensuring we have the necessary items, I walk to the kitchen to prepare it. My younger son then bellows of his need for juice. I walk to the living room, give the necessary lesson in politeness, ascertain what kind of juice he wants, walk back to the kitchen, get the juice and bring it to him. He then screams his displeasure with the chosen color of cup by throwing it across the room. I pat myself on the back for giving him a Sippy cup instead of a regular cup, take a deep breath and return to the kitchen. If he's thirsty, he'll drink from the offensive cup! Upon returning to the kitchen, I forget what I was going to make for my older son's lunch, go back to the living room and have him repeat his order. On the way back to the kitchen, the little one begins to scream again as I rush to finish making lunch before I once again forget what I was making.

Several more rounds of walking occur between the kitchen, dining room, living room and laundry room to ensure all school bags are packed and everyone is now wearing clean clothes. Unfortunately, many of these trips result in my having no idea why I was in a particular room. I tried Bill Cosby's tried and true tip of sitting down once you have arrived in the room you were heading towards, but the memory sensor in my rear end didn't always activate. Hmm. I have resigned myself to the fact that I will wander my house in a confused stupor most of the time. This is simply a side effect of having kids—they suck away a little bit of your brain cells each day. But at least you'll be in good shape from all the walking!

Upper Body Toning

One of the fun things about having toddlers is trying to figure out just how far their reach is. We all try to be responsible parents and put dangerous things out of their reach for their own safety, not to ruin all of their good fun. As toddlers age, their reach becomes longer and longer and consequently, you have to keep putting things on higher shelves. This becomes difficult for a variety of reasons, but will ultimately result in more toned biceps and triceps for you.

Beware of your toddlers! They are crafty little creatures. Just when you think you have correctly assessed your toddlers reach radius, they'll surprise you by adding a stool or chair to the mix—most likely one you have expressly forbid them to stand on. This piece of furniture will thwart your carefully orchestrated shelf placement and will force you to put your necessary items even higher up. Sure, everything is a pain in the ass to reach now! But think about how great your arms are going to look! The higher you have to reach, the more muscles you use!

A variation on this exercise is if you happen to have any balls in the house, you will find yourself needing to raise your arms to block these balls from making contact with various electronic devices and breakable items. On the upside, in addition to toning your arms, you may be able to get a side job as a goalie.

Let's remember as well that our charming little toddlers not only love to be carried from place to place, but also still require a whole lot of paraphernalia when taken on an outing. How many times have you found yourself in a parking lot (on the way to the library, a shopping expedition, a play date, etc.) with your toddler on your hip and your purse and ENORMOUS diaper bag on the other shoulder? Inevitably, you have to park in the furthest spot possible to your destination and find as you walk as quickly as possible to the entrance, your bags keep slipping and therefore need constant readjustment. All the while, your eager toddler recognizes your intended destination and is now attempting to break free of your grasp and run across traffic. As you try to hold on for dear life, you imagine your toddler wriggling out of your grasp and engaging in the scariest game of Frogger ever. By the time you actually reach your final resting point and can put your child and all of his/her crap down, you will be sweating profusely and your arms will be aching. Take comfort in knowing you gave them one hell of a workout!

Sculpting Chest, Arm & Shoulder Muscles

This exercise is my personal favorite. My kids are constantly knocking toys under the couch, the bookcase, you name it! Since your kids have shorter arms than you do, it is often your job as the resident adult to retrieve these lost toys from their furniture prisons. So, first you get down on all fours and then you bring your chest to the floor to locate the toy. Depending on how far back the toy is, you may just reach under and grab it or go down onto your stomach to get a better reach. Once you retrieve the toy, you then push yourself back up and if you're in my house, you start all over again down the length of every piece of furniture in the room. (My boys are pretty active.) If you think about the

form of your body and execute your actions carefully, you're doing a modified push up. Woohoo! Here you are rescuing these poor toys from under the couch obscurity and getting a bonus chest workout in the process. And if you stop and think about how many times a day you do this, you'll realize with a little modification in your motion, your chest, arms and shoulder muscles are going to look amazing!

The Ultimate Ab Workout

This is for those of you who have a toddler who likes to tackle. My younger son likes to play on the floor a lot, so between block towers, puzzles and board games, we can spend hours lolling about in complete contentment. Sometimes, I'll look over at him and notice a devilish gleam in his eye. Uh oh. Suddenly he runs right at me with all the strength he can muster. And this kid won't be satisfied until he has knocked me flat. After enough episodes like this, your abdominal muscles will develop to the point where you'll be able to lower yourself slowly, thereby preventing your head from slamming into the floor. Unfortunately, in the beginning, the majority of us will deal with a little pain. Just know it won't last forever.

Recently my son has added a surprise to his episodes of tackling. Now when he takes me down, he insists on bouncing. Perhaps this is his victory dance? As long as I immediately contract my abs, I'm able to stabilize my spine and keep him from repeatedly pushing it into the floor. With my newly strengthened abs, I'm able to bounce HIM up and down by using my hips and glutes. And who doesn't want a tighter tush?

The Giant Squat Extravaganza

We have finally arrived at the granddaddy of them all: the giant squat extravaganza. Also known as dinner. You know what I'm talking about. Dinner encompasses the longest series of squats EVER. If you were to show up at my house for dinner, this is what you would see. When my husband and sons come into the kitchen, I'm usually still plating their food. I make several trips to the table to deposit beverages, condiments, side dishes, utensils, etc. I sit down, am about to place my napkin in my lap when my older son realizes he needs more milk. Since I don't trust him to carry and pour from a gallon milk container, I get up and take care of it. I start to sit down, with my rear literally hovering over the chair, when my little one tells me he needs more ketchup for his hot dog. I get up, squirt out his ketchup and leave the container on the table, just in case. I'm just about to pick up my fork when my older son tells me he doesn't like his dinner. I'm blindingly hungry so I negotiate a more palatable dinner for him as my husband rolls his eyes at me and keeps eating. I get up, quickly prepare the food, give it to my son and sit back down. At which point, my younger son wants another hot dog.

It is sheer torture! Every time I sit down and am about to take a bite, someone else needs something. And I know what you're thinking—why not have your husband do it? He has at least had a few bites of food by now. The truth is he has probably finished his dinner by now (and possibly left the table.) Even if he were still present, explaining to him where the item in question is or worse, explaining to him how to prepare a particular food item would take far longer and be far more aggravating for all parties involved than just doing it myself. But you know what? All of that standing and sitting equates to a buttload (pun intended) of squats and my glutes, quads and hamstrings are going to look AWESOME!

So there you have it. As long as you live your day-to-day life with kids, you're getting all the exercise you need to be in great shape. Having said that, I would still join a gym if you have the means. I do find the gym membership has added benefits you won't find in your home—a babysitting service during your workout, a new circle of friends and the ability to work off just enough stress to you can handle all of the above without wanting to throttle someone. But it is nice to know you're getting something beneficial out of the craziness you call your life.